

Judges 11:4-40 - Thursday, December 27th, 2012

(4) It came to pass after a time that the people of Ammon made war against Israel. (5) And so it was, when the people of Ammon made war against Israel, that the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob. (6) Then they said to Jephthah, "Come and be our commander, that we may fight against the people of Ammon." (7) So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "Did you not hate me, and expel me from my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?"

- Oh sure now you're schmoozing me because you need me! Really? Tough, you already kicked me out and wanted nothing to do with me.
- It seems that God has been working behind the scenes in orchestrating the circumstances in such a fashion as to humble the Gileadites.
- The lesson here becomes quite clear; sometimes God will bring things full circle by humbling us before those to whom we have rejected.

- The perfect example of this will be the Jewish people, who have rejected their Messiah, only to realize that He is the one to deliver them.

Zechariah 12:10 NKJV "And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for *his* only *son*, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.

(8) And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "That is why we have turned again to you now, that you may go with us and fight against the people of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."

- What's striking to me in this response from the elders of Gilead is they don't really apologize, let alone ask for forgiveness from Jephthah.
- It's as if they're completely ignoring his question as it relates to their coming to him now that the Ammonites have waged war against them.
- The reason I'm sort of highlighting this is that it demonstrates how prone we all are to not "lose face," when we have egg all over our face.

(9) So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "If you take me back home to fight against the people of Ammon, and the LORD delivers them to me, shall I be your head?"

- It would appear that this Jephthah is not only a mighty man of valor, but he's also a very shrewd negotiator as evidenced by his question.
- I suppose you can't blame him for not being able to trust these men given that they had already turned on him and exiled him from the land.
- It's for this reason that these elders of Gilead are in no position to negotiate, this because their life depends on Jephthah delivering them.

Charles Spurgeon - "We should mind whom we slight, for upon those very persons we may come to be dependent."

(10) And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "The LORD will be a witness between us, if we do not do according to your words." (11) Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and commander over them; and Jephthah spoke all his words before the LORD in Mizpah.

- Just as there was a messianic picture in their rejection of their deliverer prior, so too is there another picture here in their response to him.
- Namely, the elders of Gilead with God as their witness, will according to Jephthah's words, will publicly make him the head over them.
- You probably already know where I'm going here, so suffice it to say, this points to how that yet future, Jesus will be made head over Israel.

Charles Spurgeon - "Jephthah asked no more than had been publicly promised, and was naturally his due. So when the Lord Jesus saves us from our sins, it is but just that He should reign over us."

(12) Now Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the people of Ammon, saying, "What do you have against me, that you have come to fight against me in my land?"

- This is interesting for a number of reasons not the least of which is that Jephthah is showing remarkable restraint and tactful diplomacy.
- Keep in mind that this man is a fighter, and those with him are highly trained militarily, and because of it, you'd think they'd react in kind.
- The reason I say that is, our first response is usually in the area of our greatest strength because there's a greater chance of success.

- Would to God, that we as Christians, like Jephthah, would exercise such restraint and tact so as to avoid the inevitable battles that ensue.
- Too often, we are too quick to battle against flesh and blood, when it could have all been avoided had we done what Jephthah does here.
- I wonder how many church splits could have been avoided had the people involved simply heeded the words of Jesus concerning this.

Matthew 5:21-26 NIV "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' (22) But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. (23) "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, (24) leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. (25) "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. (26) I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

Matthew 18:15-17 NIV "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. (16) But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' (17) If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

(13) And the king of the people of Ammon answered the messengers of Jephthah, "Because Israel took away my land when they came up out of Egypt, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok, and to the Jordan. Now therefore, restore those *lands* peaceably."

- If this sounds like Israel giving up land for peace that's because this sounds like Israel giving up land for peace; nothing new under the sun.
- What is it about Israel that makes her enemies want her land? I believe the answer is as old as history, by virtue of its satanic component.
- By that I mean, Israel's enemies don't want to just take Israel's land, they want to take Israel, and it's satanic in its origin starting with Abel.

(14) So Jephthah again sent messengers to the king of the people of Ammon, (15) and said to him, "Thus says Jephthah: 'Israel did not take away the land of Moab, nor the land of the people of Ammon; (16) for when Israel came up from Egypt, they walked through the wilderness as far as the Red Sea and came to Kadesh. (17) Then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, "Please let me pass through your land." But the king of Edom would not heed. And in like manner they sent to the king of Moab, but he would not *consent*. So Israel remained in Kadesh. (18) And they went along through the wilderness and bypassed the land of Edom and the land of Moab, came to the east side of the land of Moab, and encamped on the other side of the Arnon. But they did not enter the border of Moab, for the Arnon *was* the border of Moab. (19) Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, king of Heshbon; and Israel said to him, "Please let us pass through your land into our place." (20) But Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory. So Sihon gathered all his people together, encamped in Jahaz, and fought against Israel. (21) And the LORD God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them. Thus Israel gained possession of all the land of the Amorites, who inhabited that country. (22) They took possession of all the territory of the Amorites, from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan. (23) 'And now the LORD God of Israel has dispossessed the Amorites from before His people Israel; should you then possess it?

- Apparently, the people of Ammon had been watching too many documentaries on the History Channel and as such were misinformed.
- Enter Jephthah, who now provides them a history lesson, at no charge, with the hopes that they will get the record straight once and for all.
- The fact of the matter is, the God of Israel has dispossessed the other nations from before His people Israel, that they should possess it.

(24) Will you not possess whatever Chemosh your god gives you to possess? So whatever the LORD our God takes possession of before us, we will possess.

- This is as shrewd as it is humorous. Notice how that Jephthah challenges them to go to their god in order that he might give them land.
- In other words, our God, the true and living God, the God of Israel, is a land-giving God. Is your god a land-giving god? No he is not, is he.
- Actually, your god is no god at all. If he were a god, wouldn't it stand to reason that as a god he would take better care of you as your god?

(25) And now, *are* you any better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever strive against Israel? Did he ever fight against them? (26) While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and its villages, in Arer and its villages, and in all the cities along the banks of the Arnon, for three hundred years, why did you not recover *them* within that time?

- It gets even better with what Jephthah says here. Notice that he shames them by sort of singling them out in bringing up the Moabites.
- In effect, he is saying that the Moabites aren't coming to us wanting to take back the land that is rightfully ours, like you Ammonites are.
- The point being is, you're not as smart as they are. In fact, you're really stupid if you can't figure out that we took the land fair and square.

- Not only is Jephthah shaming them he's also reminding them of the fact that Israel has possessed their land for three hundred years.
- The reason he says this is, they weren't alive back then, and as such, how are they to remember how Israel ended up possessing the land.
- Furthermore, they're too late. In fact, they're three-hundred years too late. They should have taken the land three hundred years ago.

(27) Therefore I have not sinned against you, but you wronged me by fighting against me. May the LORD, the Judge, render judgment this day between the children of Israel and the people of Ammon.' "

- You would think that this should have sealed the deal, but as we'll see next, it does not. However, at least Jephthah tried, and that's huge.
- The reason I say that is because there will be times in our lives when battles will be unavoidable, and it's important that we tried to avoid it.
- There's nothing worse than the ambiguity of wondering if there was something more you could have done to make peace but didn't try it.

Charles Spurgeon - "He did well to make his appeal to heaven. When right is on our side, we may fearlessly leave results with God. If we have done all we can to make peace, and men will not act justly, the sin must rest with them."

(28) However, the king of the people of Ammon did not heed the words which Jephthah sent him. (29) Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh, and passed through Mizpah of Gilead; and from Mizpah of Gilead he advanced *toward* the people of Ammon.

- There's something here not so easily visible at first glance that is an absolute must for anyone prior to the entering into any battle they face.
- Notice how that we're told, "the Spirit of the Lord came 'upon' Jephthah." The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a prerequisite for any victory.
- It's only when the Holy Spirit is poured out "upon" us to overflowing that our lives can become as powerful as torrents of living water.

Charles Spurgeon - "Brave man as he was, he needed a divine preparation for his work, and God graciously vouchsafed it to him. When the Spirit of the Lord comes upon a man, it makes him far other than he was before; it elevates, guides, inspires, and strengthens. He who has the Spirit will find his arms upheld, and his strength rendered sufficient for accomplishing the most arduous enterprises."

(30) And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD, and said, "If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, (31) then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering." (32) So Jephthah advanced toward the people of Ammon to fight against them, and the LORD delivered them into his hands. (33) And he defeated them from Aroer as far as Minnith—twenty cities—and to Abel Keramim, with a very great slaughter. Thus the people of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.

- What Jephthah does here will prove to be unspeakably tragic, as we'll see here in a moment, this because what he does was unnecessary.
- Jephthah's vow was a rash vow, and it's evidenced in how he does this whole, "if you, then I" thing with God. He's trying to make a deal.
- It's as if he says; "God let's make a deal, how about this, if you'll give me the victory, then I promise I'll give you something in return, deal?"

Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 NIV When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. (5) It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it.

(34) When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, there was his daughter, coming out to meet him with timbrels and dancing; and she *was* *his* only child. Besides her he had neither son nor daughter. (35) And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he tore his clothes, and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low! You are among those who trouble me! For I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot go back on it." (36) So she said to him, "My father, *if* you have given your word to the LORD, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, because the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the people of Ammon." (37) Then she said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me: let me alone for two months, that I may go and wander on the mountains and bewail my virginity, my friends and I." (38) So he said, "Go." And he sent her away *for* two months; and she went with her friends, and bewailed her virginity on the mountains. (39) And it was so at the end of two months that she returned to her father, and he carried out his vow with her which he had vowed. She knew no man. And it became a custom in Israel (40) that the daughters of Israel went four days each year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

- The chapter comes to an end in a very gnarly and snarly way, if I can say it that way. The reason being is that scholars are conflicted in it.
- There are those who believe that Jephthah made good on his vow by offering his daughter as a burnt offering essentially sacrificing her.
- There are others who believe that Jephthah made good on his vow by sort of sentencing his daughter to a life of singleness and virginity.

- I'm of the belief personally, it's the latter and there are several reason that I'm in the camp with those who believe he didn't sacrifice her.
- First, human sacrifices were against the commands of God and because Jephthah was filled with the Holy Spirit he would have known this.
- Second, the Law of Moses allowed one to be released from a vow by offering an animal sacrifice instead, thus he would've substituted one.

- The third reason is found in verse thirty-seven and thirty-nine where we're told that she bewailed her virginity, and that she knew no man.
- The fourth and final reason is that Jephthah, as we referenced prior, is named in the "Hebrews Hall of Fame of Faith," as I like to call it.
- In other words, were he to disobey the commands of God, we would most certainly not find him listed in the Hall of Faith, as a man of faith.